



## *In critiques, keep the focus clear*

by Stephen Hyers

I am a firm believer that all plays are autobiographical on some level. So critiquing a play can, in many ways, be a critique of the author's life and opinions. That puts the reviewer on dangerous ground at best.

Thus, the best place to start your critique is with a positive comment. Tell the author what you liked about the play, the characters, the dialogue, the theme—even if it's only one line that you found exciting. Many critique processes, including the Liz Lerhman process, will not let you provide any other feedback until you have offered a positive response to the work. I don't think this is a bad idea.

Often, we try to provide an alternate ending or suggest other characters—but that, in fact, is not helpful to an author trying to get across a message or a theme. What you are actually doing is rewriting the script. Instead, it's better to

ask a question or describe what you felt; this lets playwrights know if they are conveying the ideas and emotions they intended. When you ask a question, however, don't insist on a response.

"I felt the character's homicidal characteristics were strong in the second scene" conveys your opinion of the character. The author may then reply with "Thank you."

Another example of a good critique response is, "I didn't like the opening to scene three; it felt out of place...." This, of course, should be followed by an explanation of your reasons.

Once you have finished, however, do not insist on a response from the author, who is then free to say, "Thank you." Or, "Did anybody else feel that the beginning was out of place?" Answering with a question is a great way to keep the discussion going and to explore the opinions of the audience.

If you are the playwright receiving a critique, remember that your

opinion of the play must rest within the play. In other words, let the play speak for itself. In early drafts, you may define your intent for writing the play; as you polish the work, however, the intent should become evident in the text.

I know that, many times, we write short plays and assignments with the City Arts Studio Theatre in mind. In reality, however, the play needs to stand on its own, so that regardless of where the play is produced (North Carolina, New York, Alaska) the play will carry its themes and ideas with it, and does not need the playwright tagging along, saying, "Well, what I wanted to do is...."

As always, listen to everyone's opinion, write it down—and ignore it all.

Members of the Greensboro Playwrights' Forum may reserve critique time at each month's meeting by sending the following information: Title; number of pages; list of characters with gender, age range, and brief description.

### Assignments

**This month:** The location is a laundromat. Characters fight over an object. Something is or becomes broken. Someone is called a name that hurts them deeply.

**Last month:** Write a play with asides to the audience in between "real" speech. It must be set in a busy place (a bar, a train, New York Stock Exchange...). Also, it must include "What would your mother say?" and "I've never seen anything like it"—twice.

Use all, some, or none of the above, enjoy it, and don't let it interfere with your "real" writing.

### Theatres soliciting for new plays

The Lynx Ensemble Theater in Brooklyn is looking for new plays—full-length scripts and related one-acts. Please send a letter of inquiry, along with the play title and synopsis, to this address:

Lynx Ensemble Theater  
295 St. John's Street, 1J  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11238

The Greensboro Playwright's Forum is still accepting submissions for this autumn's Evening of Short Plays: *Heaven & Hell*. Plays must be written by member

playwrights and must be no more than 30 pages.

### North Carolina New Play Project

The winner of the first Mark A. Gilbert Award and the 11th N.C. New Play Project is *A Mouthfulla Sacco and Vanzetti* by Michael A. Smith. The play is a comedic tale of tragic events in 1920s America.

# GPF works receiving attention

**David Hopes'** play *The Class of 1950* has been selected for the Long Beach Playhouse Festival of New Plays, and his play *Night, Sleep, and the Dreams of Lovers* has been chosen for Theatre Charlotte's Carolinas Contemporary Playwrights Festival 2004; performances will run June 4-6. Check [www.theatrecharlotte.org](http://www.theatrecharlotte.org) for details.

**Anthony Garcia-Copian's** play *Shiny* will soon be a film, thanks to an independent film company, Fire & Rain Productions. Filming began in February.

*Unlikely Hero*, a play by **Sam Stone**, appeared onstage in the Showcase at the Hendersonville Little Theatre for five regular performances and two invited dress rehearsals. It closed on February

29 to the second packed house in a row and received a standing ovation. Saturday night's crowd was so large that some patrons were turned away (all of them returned for Sunday's matinee).

**Chris Tilley** performed a recital of original songs and compositions at Elon University on March 8. The evening included the premiere of his short opera.

**John Ellis**, author of the 1999 North Carolina New Play Project, *The Americanization of Grams*, passed away peacefully on February 18. His daughter, Tracy Ellis, says, "He absolutely loved being a playwright and was very proud of his association with the North Carolina New Play Project." A celebration of his life was held on February 27 in Washington, D.C.

## When last we met...

The March meeting of the Greensboro Playwrights' Forum was a wonderful success. Twenty people attended, including new guests Katherine Wilson, Derek Bowden, Casey Landreth, and Tommy Trull. Information about the North Carolina Theatre Conference ProGathering, the *HomoGenius* short play competition in New York City, and the *Ten by Ten* short play competition in Carrboro was provided.

We read plays by **Mark Smith-Soto**, Michael Saunders, **Katrina Spires**, **Todd Fisher**, and a co-

authored play by Derek Bowden and Casey Landreth. The evening concluded with readings of the contemporary "God's Tender Perverts" by **Anthony Garcia-Copian** and a children's musical by **Bob Webb** entitled "Aesop's Foibles." Next month, we are scheduled to read "Miss Me, Yet?" by new member **Bill Black**.

## Next Meeting

**Wednesday, April 14,  
7-9 p.m.**

*City Arts Conference Room,  
Greensboro Cultural Center*

Bring writing assignments, works in progress, or just a friend. Come to read, listen, and critique. Meetings are free and open to the public.

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## inScriptiOn

The official newsletter of the  
Greensboro Playwrights' Forum

*Published monthly*

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City Arts is a division of the City of Greensboro Parks & Recreation Department.

## Theatre sites online

**Dad's Garage** (avant-garde theatre in Atlanta): [www.dadsgarage.com](http://www.dadsgarage.com).

**ManhattanTheatreSource** ("a new not-for-profit arts service organization [designed to] link the disparate communities within New York's vital off-off-Broadway movement and to provide a 'one-stop shop' resource center for independent theatre artists and audiences across the nation"): [www.theatresource.org](http://www.theatresource.org).